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Bringing Awareness to the Barriers Causing the Lack of Parent Involvement in the Public Schools

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Key Words: parent, school, resistance, barriers

Abstract: The primary purpose of this study was to bring awareness to barriers that are causing the lack of parent involvement in public schools. Data were collected from parents, teachers, principal, one focus group, field notes and observations, which revealed four concepts: work, communication, student's academics and strategies promoting parent involvement.

Parental involvement is an essential commitment on the part of the parent to the child and to the school. Parents face many barriers that impede involvement in their children's education. For instance, the school system's inability to deal with the non-traditional families, i.e., families with divorced parents, single parents, grandparents taking care of their grandchildren and blended families are some examples of a nontraditional family. Moreover, parents are not embraced in the schools, they are present but yet overlooked as insignificant. Some parents lack the knowledge of their children's academics. Some parents lack the knowledge and understanding of how the Local School Council and Parent Action Council committees are conducted and what is expected of them. For example, some parents, who participate on these committees, use the opportunity as an opening to become closer to the principal, thus losing focus of their initial responsibilities, the academic success of the children.

Purpose

The primary purpose of this study is to shine light on the voices of the parents, teachers and principals, individually and then collectively in hopes to bring awareness to the barriers causing the lack of parent involvement in the public schools; ultimately, increasing parent involvement through a more collaborative approach, involving all key stakeholders.

Theoretical Framework

Through knowledge and understanding, critical theory encourages freedom and hope for a better world and inspires courage to challenge injustices. In addition, to effectively and authentically write about the phenomena, it was imperative that a better understanding as to why certain behaviors of resistance and the mind-set of inferiority appear to be demonstrated in the schools, in the communities, and in the homes. "Brookfield's (2005) critical theory tradition draws on Marxist scholarship to illuminate the ways in which people accept as normal a world characterized by massive inequities and the systemic exploitation of the many by the few." Critical theory exposes the ideology manipulations of the status quo.

Case Design

A qualitative case study was the design used to assist in shedding light on the barriers that are affecting parent involvement, in the public schools. The design allowed me to go into the trenches of the school, parent's homes and the community to interview, observe and analyze participants in their own environment, adding an authentic value to the research. Face-to-face interactions with the participants, in their habitation, provided a richer and authentic dialogue.

Guiding Questions

Three research questions were developed to assist in guiding the study.

1. What are the barriers causing the lack of parent involvement, in the public schools?
2. Why do some parents resist participation in the public schools?
3. How can principal, teachers and parents collectively and innovatively increase parent involvement in the public schools?

Findings

The research findings revealed several barriers for the lack of parent involvement in the public schools. However, four core concepts were used in this study: 1. balancing time between work, chores and school; 2. lack of communication; 3. academic challenges; 4. strategies promoting parent involvement.

Recommendations

Parent commonality workshops should be developed. All parents do not have the same issues and concerns. However, parents have different concerns; some have financial, homelessness, educational and student academic concerns. "It is unrealistic to treat parents as one group. The needs and issues are very different," (Payne, 2005, p.2).

Another recommendation is to develop workshops for parents that provide details on the specific functions of the school committees. For instance, the Local School Council (LSC) and Parent Action Council (PAC) can educate the parents concerning what these particular committees entail and the parent's role in it. Arming parents with the information of these committees, I believe, could develop into well-informed parents, as well as increased parent involvement.

Implications for Adult Education Theory and Practice

As adult educators and adult learners, I believe that learning to critically reflect is vital to educational attainment. Developing a rationale and acquiring an understanding of the knowledge that is delivered and received, and recapping the educational experience provides a greater appreciation of the learning process. In addition, critical reflection, hypothetically speaking, teaches us to not be easily conformed, but allowing our minds to be renewed and transformed to thinking outside the box, gathering the perspectives of others and making change.

Conclusion

In conducting this study, four concepts were employed. Noting that one concept does not negate the other of its importance, out of the four conceptions, the one that stood out the most was communication. In my opinion, communication sets the tone and the Obie once of the school; effective communication is the beginning of healing miss-communications and obtaining understanding, which in fact could lead to positive collaborations of the triads, parents, teachers and the principal.

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